

**Fisheries Committee Meeting
February 7, 2014
Commission Room**

I. Discussion Item – Alligator Gar Harvest Restrictions

Alligator gar were extirpated from Kentucky and other Midwestern states during the early part of the 20th Century. A few states have successfully re-established naturally reproducing populations of this particular gar species. As part of the successful re-establishment, new sportfishing opportunities were created for anglers and bow fishermen. The gar can grow to over 200 pounds, and their large size makes them popular as trophies. Alligator gar were re-introduced into Western Kentucky streams during 2010 in an effort to re-establish a naturally reproducing population. As the stocked gar increase in size, they become very vulnerable to anglers and bow fishermen. Beyond re-establishment of the gar, our ultimate goal is to allow fishing and bowfishing opportunities for the trophy-sized fish; however, if enough of the gar are not allowed to mature, they will never become a self sustaining population. Therefore, we recommend a harvest and bow fishing restriction for Alligator gar. We will continue to monitor the populations; and when it becomes obvious to our biologists that the fish have firmly established a natural, reproducing population, we will consider initiating a harvest program that will provide new trophy fishing and bowfishing opportunities.

II. Discussion Item – Floyd's Fork Seasonal Trout Regulations

A considerable amount of private money has been dedicated to increasing the quality of parks and fishing access associated with Floyd's Fork Creek. The project, which has been named "The Parklands of Floyds Fork", should be nearing completion in 2015. "The Parklands" are rated in the top ten of new park systems in the United States that were built and maintained with private money. Considering the increased access, the Louisville Chapter of Trout Unlimited has requested that the Department consider making Floyd's Fork Creek a seasonal catch and release trout stream. The Chapter believes the designation will bring many trout anglers to the 27-mile reach during the October – March season. Currently during that period, there is minimal harvest pressure; therefore few harvest anglers would be affected by the seasonal regulations. There is also a FINS pond located very near to the stream that provides a location for anglers fishing to harvest trout for food.

III. Discussion Item – Catfish Tournament Records

Trophy catfish fishing tournaments are increasing in number during the past decade. The tournaments provide economic boosts to the local economies and many non-tournament anglers become educated to the potential of catching trophy catfish. The relatively recent increased interest in trophy catfish in the Ohio River has resulted in increased scrutiny of commercial fishing for catfish; especially concerning trophy-sized catfish that have become valuable to the pay lake industry. As a result, the Fisheries Division has increased its effort to collect data pertinent to

Ohio River trophy-sized catfish. Over a period of time, data related to size and weights of catfish caught during tournaments are useful towards helping to assess the demographics of catfish populations. We propose creating regulations whereby larger catfish tournaments (at least 25 boats) will be register with KDFWR using our tournament website and provide data including individual lengths and weights of catfish caught, number of boats, tournament rules, winning weights and total weights brought in by contestants during the tournament. We also propose that anglers provide the number and lengths of catfish released (not brought to the weigh-ins). Examination of tournament catch across seasons and water bodies should provide enough information that catch trends could be used as an index of catfish populations' qualities.

IV. Discussion Item – New FINS Lake

The FINS program has proven to be successful in bringing new anglers to fishing and reducing the churn of existing anglers. The ponds are also very useful for fishing events for children. The FINS ponds are overstocked with catfish and trout to ensure the highest quality fishing experiences. The FINS program has increased from 6 ponds in 2009 to 39 in 2013. We propose adding the 40th FINS pond: the Maysville-Mason County Recreation Park Lake. Fishing regulations will be the same for this lake as the other lakes enrolled in the FINS program

V. Discussion Item – Hatchery Creek Trout Harvest Restriction

The Wetland and Stream Mitigation Program's Hatchery Creek Project is located below (and created by) outflow from Wolf Creek National Fish Hatchery. Water from the hatchery currently flows through a short riprap channel which then enters a culvert and drops quickly through a steep-sided ditch before entering the Cumberland River. A considerable amount of siltation is carried into the tailwater annually. This project will fill in the eroding ditch and create a new, meandering stream channel extending over 1-mile across the flood plain before entering the Cumberland River. The new channel will be designed to invite significant numbers of large trout to move into the improved reach during spawning migrations. Construction on the Hatchery Creek, FILO project is expected to initiate during summer of 2014, but there is a possibility that the new reach will be finished and fishable by fall 2014. Because of the potential for trout to use Hatchery Creek for spawning, we propose to: 1) limit fishing to artificial baits only; and 2) no harvest for all trout species in the new reach. The regulations on the existing rip rap channel immediately below the hatchery would be maintained to match the Lake Cumberland tailwater, as they are currently.

VI. Discussion Item – Statewide Restriction on Culling Trout

Trout are considered cold-water fish and are extremely susceptible to perishing from the same stressors that many cool or warm-water fish species could normally withstand. Culling is one of those potential stressors. It is highly unlikely that a trout could be caught, placed in a livewell or basket, and (at some future time) released with expectations of it surviving; therefore, it is pointless to allow culling. This reasoning was used when "no culling" regulations were implemented for Kentucky's premier trout fishery: the Lake Cumberland Tailwater. We propose to prohibit culling of trout statewide in order to reduce wasting of the stocked fish. In the 2002 Trout

Angler Attitude Survey, the question of culling was addressed, and by far, most of the respondents agreed that trout should not be culled (73% supported no culling; 14% opposed).

VII. Discussion Item – Renaming Letcher County Boat Ramp

This Department received a request concerning renaming the Letcher County Boat Ramp to “Watts Boat Ramp”. This project was located on the North Fork of Kentucky River and built on a grade left by the Department of Transportation from the construction of a bridge crossing. A small section of the parking lot was built on Mr. Watts’ property. In light of his willingness to assist the Department, it seems appropriate to allow this request which was made by his son, Ernest Watts.

VIII. Update Item – Commercial Fishing Activity Over Private Property

A number of landowners along the Mississippi River are concerned over commercial fishermen fishing or floating over their property during duck hunting seasons. Some of them have requested the Department to create regulations that would prohibit commercial fishing activity or anyone from floating over their properties without their permission during duck hunting seasons. These requests were spawned by the belief that Asian carp commercial fishing activity will soon increase.

Currently, there are regulations in place that prevent anyone from dropping an anchor, nets, or lines on private property during high-water events. Therefore, it is unlawful for commercial fishermen to fish on a private landowner’s property without permission. Any similar regulation would be redundant.

There are no regulations that prohibit commercial fishermen or any boaters from floating over private property during high water conditions. The Department cannot make restrictions on the use of lands or water that we do not own or manage. Therefore, there is no practical way to create a regulation to prevent floating over flooded property.

The Department has communicated with commercial fishermen about laws concerning anchoring anything on private lands and the importance of respecting landowners wishes regarding floating over private lands during hunting seasons. We believe the chances of that happening are extremely remote, but we will continue to keep commercial industry aware of the potential problems